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ABSTRACT

Research on the female offender has produced two explanations of the female criminal personality: the female offender either as a masculinated women or as an anguished woman possessing low self-esteem and poor self-control. To investigate the applicability of each position, 144 black male and female criminals and noncriminals completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Tennessee Self Concept Scale, the Rosenbaum Self Control Schedule, a shortened form of the Quick Test, and a demographic questionnaire. Demographically, the group had a mean age of 20.8 years, a mean educational level of 10.3 years, were unemployed or had an income below $5000, and rated 21 on a 11-77 point scale on social status. An analysis of the results showed that contrary to the masculinated woman theory, female criminals were more feminine than male criminals or male and female noncriminals. In partial support of the anguished woman theory, female criminals possessed lower self-esteem and self-control than female noncriminals. (BL)

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The Relationship of Sex-Role Orientation, Self-Concept and Self-Control to Female Criminality

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Running Head: FEMALE CRIMINALITY

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Abstract

Two general personality theories have been proposed to account for female criminality. The masculinated woman theory depicts female criminals as having characteristics more typically found in men. The anguished woman theory characterizes the female criminal as an individual with low self-esteem and poor self-control. In an attempt to test the applicability of each position, male and female criminals and non-criminals completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, the Rosenbaum Self-Control Schedule, the Quick Test measure of intelligence, and a demographic questionnaire. Contrary to the masculinated woman theory, the results indicated that women criminals scored significantly higher on femininity and lower on masculinity than did individuals in the other groups. Partially supporting the anguished woman theory, women criminals scored lower on self-esteem and self-control than did women non-criminals. The results are discussed in relation to the nature of female crimes and the psychological limitations of strong sex-typing.

The Relationship of Sex-Role Orientation, Self-Concept and Self-Control to Female Criminality

Factors that influence criminal behavior have long been a topic of interest and investigation. There are, obviously, many factors that influence criminality in both men and women. Recent work has begun to point out the social and economic variables that contribute to female involvement in crime (Rans, 1978). Clearly these factors are important, but not all individuals who suffer economic deprivation commit crimes. For this reason, the present study was conceived to explore possible personality variables involved in female criminality.

Research on the female offender, though scant in relation to the attention focused on her male counterpart, has produced two major explanations of the female criminal personality: the masculinated woman theory and the anguished woman theory. The first portrays the female offender as a masculinated woman, emulating male behavior in her choice of a criminal career, while the second attributes female criminality to certain personality factors, such as low self-esteem and impulsivity, which combine to form the backdrop for criminal involvement.

Research related to the masculinated woman theory of female criminality has pointed to the biological similarity between female criminals and men (Lombroso, 1920), the penis-envy reflected in female criminal behavior (Klein, 1976), and the sex-role rebellion evident in female criminals (Klein, 1976). Some have also posited a correlation between the rise in female crime and the women's movement (Crites, 1976;

Deming, 1977; Iacovetta, 1975; Levanthal, 1977). They theorize that the growing economic independence and increased psychological liberation of women is contributing to a new and more serious form of criminality, characterized by aggressive, violent offenses (Crites, 1976).

Empirical support for the masculinated woman theory is found in two studies by Cochrane (1971, 1974) which dealt with values as correlates of deviancy in female offenders. In these studies, the female inmates displayed greater hedonism and less concern for other people, the country, or the world in general than the control groups. Cochrane believed that these female offenders would find it difficult to fit into the feminine role patterns drawn up by society, due either to a certain amount of male identification (the female prisoners' values were more similar to those of the male prisoners than they were to the female controls) or a rejection of the female mold (Cochrane, 1971).

Cochrane's studies are significant since they form the one solid empirical base of the masculinated woman theory. Other characteristics of female crime, such as its relation to the woman's movement and its expression in increasingly violent crimes, can be challenged. In reality, the women's rights movement has largely bypassed the subpopulation of poor, minority females into which the female offender typically falls (Crites, 1976). These women, rather than being recipients of expanded rights and opportunities gained by the women's movement are, instead, witnessing declining survival options (Crites, 1976). Female offenders are generally poor,

uneducated, unemployed or employed in low-wage, low-status jobs, responsible for their own support and often the support of their children (French, 1977; Hovey, 1971; Velimesis, 1975; Wyrick and Owens, 1977). Their crimes continue to mirror their traditional role in society. They are predominantly small-scale property and victimless offenses reflecting both the female status as a minor consumer and her tendency to inflict self-directed rather than outward-directed injury (Ward, Jackson and Ward, 1968). In addition, most female offenders are not involved in violent crimes - approximately 11 percent of all female crime is violent in nature compared to 89 percent of all male crime (United States General Accounting Office, 1979). Although dramatic increases are reported for women involved in property crimes, the proportion of women arrested for violent crimes has remained relatively constant for the past twenty years (Female Offender Resource Center, 1976; Noblit and Burcart, 1976).

Despite these facts which would seem to discredit the relationship between female criminality and the Women's Liberation Movement, the belief of a connection between the two still exists. Indeed, the possible influence of the Women's Movement on female criminal behavior has not been empirically disproved to this point. One study (Levanthal, 1977) has attempted to address the issue. Levanthal's research indicates that female criminals exhibit less liberated sex-role attitudes than female college students, a finding which would seem to discredit the connection between the Women's Movement

and female criminality. However, the noncomparability of the offender population and the college population employed in the study leaves these results in doubt. A more rigorous study, using a sex-role inventory measure and more comparable samples would be needed to obtain more definitive results.

It also appears that female crimes are closely tied to the female sex-role, rather than reflecting male attitudes and values. Women seem to commit crimes in roles auxiliary to men and for lesser returns, often making them more vulnerable to arrest (Hoffman-Bustamante, 1973). In addition, those acts for which women have received adequate training in the normal process of growing up are more likely to have high rates of women arrestees. For example, women are trained to go shopping for household goods and this "training" could be related to the criminal behavior of shoplifting. Those crimes for which more masculine skills and techniques are required (e.g., auto theft) show a lower then expected rate of female participation (Hoffmann-Bustamante, 1973).

The "anguished woman" theory, rather than explaining female crimes as an attempt to emulate masculine behavior, unites various theories which link such personality variables as low self-esteem and poor impulse control, to female involvement in crime (Konopka, 1966; Pollak, 1950; Thomas, 1923; Vedder and Somerville, 1970). Such personality characterictis as thrill-seeking, loneliness, dependency, and deceptiveness also fall under the umbrella of the anguished woman

theory.

Personality studies depict the female offender as a woman lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem, highly subjective, isolated and withdrawn from social intercourse (Panton, 1975). In addition, the female offender shows greater emotional sensitivity, depression and dissatisfaction with her life than the female controls against whom she has been measured (Barker and Adams, 1962; Cunningham, 1963; Dahlstrom, Welsh and Dahlstrom, 1972; Hathaway and Monachesi, 1969; Panton, 1975). Unfortunately, much of this research has relied more on subjective impressions than empirical data, has used inadequate or no comparison groups and often has used inappropriate statistical procedures.

The aim of the present study was to investigate both the masculinated woman theory and the anguished woman theory and to draw some conclusions as to which of the approaches can better account for female criminal behavior. In order to assess this, male and female criminal and non-criminal participants completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974, 1981), the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965; Vacchiano and Strauss, 1968), and the Rosenbaum Self-Control Schedule (Rosenbaum, 1980). The subjects also completed a shortened form of the Quick Test, an intelligence measure (Ammons and Ammons, 1962) and filled out a demographic information form, so that comparability of the sample groups could be evaluated.

Method

Subjects

One hundred forty-four subjects participated in the study. The

four groups consisted of (a) 38 black female and (b) 35 black male inmates from an urban correctional facility, and (c) 35 black female and (d) 36 black male participants in pre-vocational training programs serviced by a city technical college. The male and female criminal participants in the study were serving sentences not exceeding two years for the commission of misdemeanors and/or minor felonies. Non-criminal participants were selected on the basis of their general educational and occupational similarity to the criminal samples. The study was limited to black participants since the majority of inmates held in the urban correctional facility employed in the study were of that racial group.

A limited amount of demographic information was obtained for each of the 144 participants in the study. This information consisted of: respondent's age ($\underline{M}$ = 20.8 years), respondent's education ($\underline{M}$ = 10.3 years), respondent's income (85 percent of the respondents had incomes below $5000), respondent's occupation (83 percent of the respondents were unemployed or on welfare), respondent's Hollingshead social status rating ($\underline{M}$ = 21, on a scale of 11 to 77), father's occupation (45 percent unemployed or on welfare; 30 percent employed in unskilled, low-status occupations), mother's occupation (68 percent unemployed or on welfare; 24 percent employed in unskilled, low-status occupations), father's education ($\underline{M}$ = 9.5 years), mother's education ($\underline{M}$ = 9.8 years), and mean number of correct responses on form 1 of the Quick Test intelligence measure ($\underline{M}$ = 33.8).

Procedure

Three inventories, the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Rosenbaum Self-Control Schedule, and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, were administered to the participants in groups of five to ten persons.

After the participants were seated in the testing room, the white, female interviewer greeted them and proceeded to distribute informed consent blanks, demographic information sheets, the three inventories and the Quick Test. The interviewer explained that the subjects would be participating in a study investigating a number of personality characteristics, so it was important that they be honest in responding to the inventories.

The interviewer stated that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that subjects could choose not to participate and leave at any point during the session. She called their attention to the informed consent blank, asked them to read it silently and sign it if they were willing to participate in the study.

Following this, the subjects' attention was drawn to the demographic information sheets and the interviewer explained that although the anonymity of each subject would be strictly maintained, it was necessary to obtain a minimal amount of information about the participants. The interviewer then allowed the participants a five-minute period to fill out the demographic information sheets.

When this task had been completed, the interviewer asked the subjects to refer to the folders containing the three inventories and the Quick Test. Detailed instructions on each of the instruments were then given to the subjects. The subjects were instructed to begin working on the Quick Test as soon as the instructions were completed. The

interviewer informed the subjects that when they finished answering the inventories, they should place the demographic information sheets inside the inventory folders, hand them in and leave the testing room. The subjects were then thanked in advance for their participation in the study. The majority of subjects were able to complete the task within an hour period.

Results

Demographic Information

Two-by-two analyses of variance, with sex and criminality as independent variables, performed on age, education, income, and Hollingshead social status rating of the respondent, and father's and mother's occupation and education yielded the following results. Significant main effects for sex indicated that men had greater incomes, $F(1,140) = 5.06$, $p < .05$, scored higher on the Hollingshead social status rating scale, $F(1,140) = 6.30$, $p < .05$, and came from families in which the father's, $F(1,140) = 4.07$, $p < .05$, and mother's education, $F(1,140) = 4.44$, $p < .05$, was greater than the women counterparts. Significant main effects for criminality indicated that criminals were older, $F(1,140) = 24.91$, $p < .001$, more educated, $F(1,140) = 6.42$, $p < .05$, had greater incomes,[1] $F(1,140) = 22.59$, $p < .001$, scored higher on the Hollingshead social status rating, $F(1,140) = 30.50$, $p < .001$, and came from families in which the father's education was greater, $F(1,140) = 7.71$, $p < .01$, than the non-criminal counterparts. Newman-Keuls analyses based on the significant interactions for sex by criminality on income, $F(1,140) = 5.05$, $p < .05$, and Hollingshead social status

rating, $F(1,140) = 6.14$, $p < .05$, indicated that male criminals scored significantly higher than did any other groups (all $p < .05$). No other main effects or interactions reached significance. Because of the partial noncomparability between the samples as indicated by these results, care was taken to follow up analysis of variance with analysis of covariance procedures in order to partial out possible confounding effects.

Bem Sex Role Inventory - Femininity Scale

A two-by-two analysis of variance, with sex and criminality as independent variables, performed on the total femininity score on the Bem Sex Role Inventory indicated a significant main effect for sex, $F(1,140) = 16.64$, $p < .001$, and an interaction for sex by by criminality, $F(1,140) = 6.30$, $p < .01$.

Three analyses of covariance were also conducted to assess the degree to which other variables could account for the above effects. The first analysis of covariance assessed the effects of sex and criminality on femininity scores with subject variables (age, education, income, occupation, and Hollingshead social status rating) as covariates. This analysis indicated a significant main effect for sex, $F(1,135) = 18.34$, $p < .001$, and an interaction for sex by criminality, $F(1,135) = 11.11$, $p < .001$. A second analysis of covariance was performed in a similar manner with parental attributes (father's occupation, mother's occupation, father's education, mother's education) as covariates. Again, a significant main effect for sex, $F(1,136) = 18.11$, $p < .001$, and for sex by criminality,

$F(1,136) = 8.53$, $p < .01$, was found. A final analysis of covariance was conducted with scores from the Quick Test intelligence measure as the covariate. Again, the main effect for sex, $F(1,139) = 27.36$, $p < .001$, and the sex by criminality interaction, $F(1,139) = 4.93$, $p < .05$, reached significance.

A Dunnett's Multiple Range Test, comparing all mean values to the female criminal mean, indicated that female criminals displayed significantly higher femininity scores than their male criminal counterparts ($p < .01$) or the male ($p < .01$) and female $p < .05$) non-criminal participants. (See Table 1 for all results).

Insert Table 1 about here

Bem Sex Role Inventory - Masculinity Scale

A two-by-two analysis of variance, with sex and criminality as independent variables, performed on the total masculinity score on the Bem Sex Role Inventory, indicated a significant main effect for sex, $F(1,140) = 81.62$, $p < .001$, and an interaction for sex by criminality, $F(1,140) = 12.40$, $p < .001$.

Three analyses of covariance were conducted to assess the extent to which other variables could account for the above effects. First, an analysis of covariance was perfomed with sex and criminality as independent variables and the subject variables as covariates. This analysis indicated a signficiant main effect for sex, $F(1,135) = 68.29$, $p < .001$, and an interaction for sex by criminality, $F(1,135) =$

12.57, $p < .001$. A second analysis of covariance, using sex and criminality as independent variables and parental attributes as covariates, was conducted and yielded a significant main effect for sex, $F(1,136) = 83.59$, $p < .001$, and an interaction for sex by criminality, $F(1,136) = 12.83$, $p < .001$. A third and final analysis of covariance was perfomed with sex and criminality as independent variables and the Quick Test as the covariate. Again, a significant main effect for sex, $F(1,139) = 91.00$, $p < .001$, and an interaction for sex by criminality, $F(1,139) = 12.66$, $p < .001$, was found.

A Dunnett's Multiple Range Test, comparing all mean values to the female criminal mean, indicated that female criminals displayed significantly lower masculinity scores than their male criminal counterparts or the male and female non-criminal subjects (all $p < .01$).

Rosenbaum Self-Control Schedule

A two-by-two analysis of variance, with sex and criminality as independent variables, performed on the subject responses to the Rosenbaum Self-Control Schedule revealed no significant effects. The three analyses of covariance, with subject variables, parental attributes, and Quick Test scores as covariates, each indicated a significant main effect ($p < .05$) for criminality, $F(1,135) = 4.23$, $F(1,136) = 5.18$, $F(1,139) = 9.49$ respectively

In order to further examine the nature of the criminality effect, a simple main effects test, using the error term from the Quick Test covariate analysis, was done for each sex. The simple main effects

test for women indicated that female criminals scored significantly lower on self-control than did female non-criminals, $F(1,139) = 4.86$, $p < .05$. The simple main effects test for men indicated no significant difference due to criminality.

Tennessee Self-Concept Scale

A two-by-two analysis of variance, with sex and criminality as independent variables, performed on participants' responses to the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale indicated no significant effects. Using the same method previously described, three analyses of covariance were run employing subject variables, parental attributes and the Quick Test as covariates. Again, no significant effects were found.

One additional analysis of covariance seemed called for. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale includes a True/False scale which measures whether the individual's approach to the task involves a strong tendency to agree or disagree regardless of item content. It does not seem unreasonable to hypothesize that individuals in the criminal groups may be susceptible to this type of response bias. Indeed, a 2 x 2 analysis of variance on the True/False scores indicated a significant main effect for criminality, $F(1,140) = 19.55$, $p < .001$. Given this finding, an analysis of covariance was conducted on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale scores with sex and criminality as the independent variables and the True/False scores as the covariate. This analysis indicated a significant main effect for criminality, $F(1,139) = 16.06$, $p < .001$.

In order to further examine the nature of this effect, a simple main effects test was done on criminality within each sex. The

simple main effects test for women indicated that female criminals scored significantly lower than femalenon-criminals, $F(1,139) = 6.74$, $p < .05$. The simple main effects test for men found no significant difference due to criminality.

Discussion

The present study was designed to explore the applicability of the masculinated woman theory and the anguished woman theory as explanations of the nature of female criminality. Significant effects on both the Masculinity and Femininity scales of the Bem Sex Role Inventory indicate that female criminals are less stereotypically masculine and more stereotypically feminine than either their male criminal counterparts or the male and female non-criminal subjects. Further, results from the Rosenbaum Self-Control Schedule appear to point to a lower degree of self-control in criminal participants than in their non-criminal counterparts. This effect is primarily due to differences between female criminals and female non-criminals. Finally, when True/False scale scores serve as the covariate, significant results achieved on an analysis of covariance of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale indicate that, overall, criminals have lower self-concepts than the non-criminal control subjects. Again, this effect is primarily due to differences between female criminals and female non-criminals.

The results of the present study, especially the significantly higher femininity scores and significantly lower masculinity scores of the female criminal subjects, run counter to the masculinated

woman theory of female criminality, which asserts that women involved in crime are more masculine than their non-criminal counterparts and engage in criminal activity as an expression of their masculinated self-image. Based on the present study as well as previous research findings which point to the sex-typed, relatively non-violent nature of female crime (Wolfgang, 1958; Gibbens and Prince, 1962; Hoffman-Bustamante, 1973; Female Offender Resource Center, 1976; Noblit and Burcart, 1976; Smart, 1977) it appears that the masculinated woman theory is a rather naive, simplistic, and uncorroborated explanation of female criminality. If women were indeed committing crimes out of a desire to be more like men, one would expect them to be exhibiting more masculine traits and values than their non-criminal female peers, as well as engaging in an increasing percentage of violent, typically male sex-typed crimes. This simply is not the case. Indeed, the present data suggest that female and male criminals are particularly sex-typed.[2] Given that previous research has indicated that strongly sex-typed individuals are less adapative in some social situations (Ickes and Barnes, 1978) and prefer to choose sex-appropriate activities. even at personal cost (Bem, 1975; Bem and Lenney, 1976) it can be speculated that sex-typed individuals, because of their psychologically limited options, are more likely to choose illegal but sex-appropriate activities.

The present study tends to give moderate support to the anguished woman theory of female ciminality. Results from the Rosenbaum Self-Control Schedule and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale give

some preliminary indication that female criminals have a lower degree of self-control and self-esteem than their female non-criminal peers. While these results appear to support the anguished woman theory, they are not unequivocal. A close examination of the results indicates that the effects of criminality for women on self-control and self-concept are due primarily to the relatively higher scores for non-criminal women. Such a pattern can only be used to support the anguished woman theory, if it can be argued that most women from this particular racial, social, and economic group normally score higher on self-esteem and self-control than do men from this group.

Such an argument, in our opionion, is not unreasonable. While research on the Black female is almost as scarce as that on the female offender, there appears to be some evidence that Black women do have a high degree of self-confidence (Fichter, 1970), as well as a high level of confidence in their competence and ability (Epstein, 1973). In addition, studies of Black adolescents reveal that Black females exhibit fewer behavioral difficulties than their male counterparts (Pettigrew, 1964), have higher academic achievement and intellectual development than Black males (Baughman and Dahlstrom, 1968), and a greater awareness of the occupational opportunity structure for members of the Black race than do Black males. It appears that the Black community represents the primary reference group for Black women and provides a different standard of self-evaluation than that of the White community (Gurin and Epps, 1975) and this standard can serve as the basis for the realistic enhancement of

self-esteem among Black women (Dobson, 1970; Ladner, 1972). Given these results, it can be expected that Black women normally score higher on self-control and self-esteem measures than Black men. The fact that this elevation was not evident for criminal women suggests unusually low scores for this group.

While care should be taken in extrapolating from the results on this limited sample, the study is encouraging in that it repudiates predictions from the masculinated woman theory of female criminality. Future research should concentrate on specifying more exactly the psychological characteristics that are related to female criminality as well as exploring personality variables in the context of economic theories of female criminality.

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Author Notes

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Footnotes

[1]The reason criminals reported higher incomes is that they were asked to report their income level prior to imprisonment while the non-criminals reported current income.

[2]*Post hoc* Newman-Keuls analyses indicated that male criminals scored higher on the masculinity scale and lower on the femininity scale than did any of the other groups, including the male non-criminals.

Table 1

All Scores as a Function of Sex and Criminality

	Women		Men	
Dependent Measure	Criminal	Non-Criminal	Criminal	Non-Criminal
BSRI - Femininity	55.82	51.11	43.83	48.31
BSRI - Masculinity	42.24	48.88	62.14	57.58
Rosenbaum Self-Control	34.84	57.34	35.34	40.67
Tennessee Self-Concept	301.58	317.00	307.28	309.89